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ABSTRACT

A historical review is presented of Sloan U.S. Army General Hospital, the second largest Union Army hospital in Vermont, which operated from June 1864 to October 1865. Sloan Hospital later became Vermont College, which in 1972 merged with Norwich University. Sloan Hospital operated during the last year and a half of the Civil War and consisted of about 24 large buildings and a number of satellite structures. During its 16 months of operation, approximately 1,700 Union soldiers were admitted for treatment, most of them Vermonters. Information is provided on the establishment of the hospital, financing the construction costs, site selection, types of illnesses that were treated, operation of the hospital, purchase of the buildings/land after the Civil War by Newbury Seminary, and relocation of the buildings and establishment of Montpelier Seminary in 1868. (SW)

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THE HOSPITAL THAT BECAME A COLLEGE

SLOAN U. S. ARMY GENERAL HOSPITAL

MONTPELIER, VERMONT

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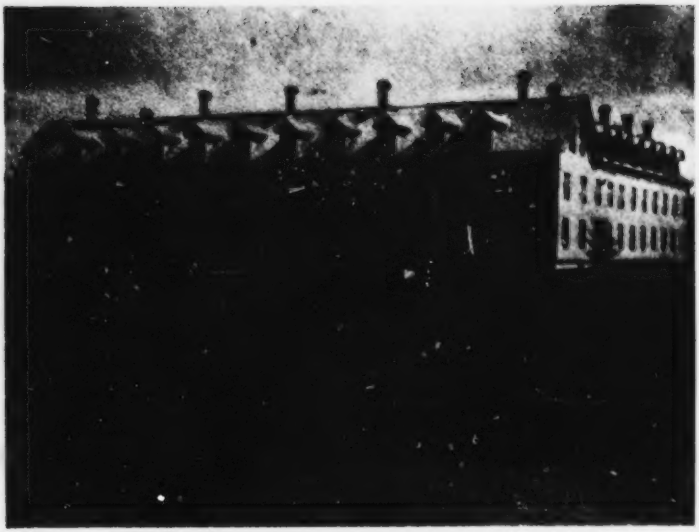

Courtesy Vermont Historical Society

MAIN HALL, MONTPELIER SEMINARY, ca. 1870.

This building on the east side of College Street was constructed from sections of wards from Sloan General Hospital. For almost 90 years Main Hall was the principal dormitory and dining hall, first for Montpelier Seminary and later for Vermont College. In 1957, it was demolished and replaced by Noble and Bishop-Hatch Halls.

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MONTPELIER, VERMONT

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Friends of the Norwich University Library
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THE HOSPITAL THAT BECAME A COLLEGE

SLOAN U.S. ARMY GENERAL HOSPITAL
MONTPELIER, VERMONT

Some years ago, in 1972 to be exact, a marriage transpired between Norwich University of Northfield, Vermont, and Vermont College of Montpelier, Vermont. It is doubtful that anyone at Norwich University, the oldest private military college in the United States, realized that by this amalgamation a great bit of Vermont military history was being added to its already rich trove.

The campus of Vermont College, situated on Seminary Hill in the "Capital City," was once the site of the Sloan U.S. Army General Hospital. This hospital operated during the last year and a half of the Civil War, or the "Rebellion" as it was called by Vermonters in those days. Sloan Hospital was a large Union Army installation comprised of some 24 large buildings and a number of satellite structures. During its 16 months of operation, approximately 1,700 Union soldiers were admitted for treatment, most of them Vermonters.

Noted military historian, R. Ernest Dupuy described typical Civil War medical services:

...as inadequate in strength and methodology. From Bull Run to the Seven Days' Battles the condition of the wounded had been, as in all previous wars, one of horror. When they were haphazardly gathered from the field after fighting ceased, the few military medicos and their scanty staffs present, hastily did what they could for them, and then they were rattled and bounced about in wagons to be dumped in hospitals, churches and barns in Washington.

Male attendants and teamsters were mostly interested in pilfering from their helpless charges, in whiskey-guzzling, and in saving their own skins. Calls for volunteer civilians to assist in the task brought response mainly from Washington rapscallions equally bent on petty larceny.[1]

Is this an accurate description of the medical care which Vermonters received during the Civil War? To answer this question, primary and secondary sources were consulted. The information that follows is not based on folklore, conjecture, or distortion of facts to make history more attractive. It is based on records that have been found in many places, primarily original source documents, including the excellent records of the Union Army and those of Dr. Henry Janes of Waterbury, Vermont, who was the U.S. Army Surgeon in command at Sloan Hospital. Dr. Janes' Papers, which survived the great Vermont Flood of 1927, and are now preserved by the Waterbury Historical Society, were the source of much of the information for this project.

According to Robert Corson, Military Agent for Vermont at Philadelphia, Civil War wounded were to be found "...lying in all

stages of suffering, in barns, barn-yards, out-buildings, and in the fields." They were then transported to hospitals in Washington, Philadelphia, and the surrounding area:

> They were stowed away by hundreds in freight cars, and lay for days and hours upon hard floors unable to move, with their wounds unwashed, and but partly dressed, while the jolting over rough roads added to their already keen suffering.[2]

Another method of transport that Corson mentioned was on crowded pitching steamers.[3]

It is little wonder that the State of Vermont moved quickly to embrace the opportunity as soon as the U.S. War Department allowed the State to transport her wounded home for treatment.[4] The seriously wounded and ill had to remain in New York, Philadelphia, or Baltimore hospitals, but those capable of travel were sent back to Vermont. Frank F. Holbrook and Daniel L. Lyman, State commissioners directing this effort, proceeded to "... visit the sick and disabled soldiers and procure their removal to this State, whenever their speedy recovery would be thereby promoted." Under an agreement with the U.S. War Department and the Surgeon General of the Union Army, the commissioners were:

> ...allowed to visit all the United States' General Hospitals, obtain lists of all Vermont soldiers, whom they might find, procure those to be designated by the Surgeon in charge, whose recovery was not probable within thirty days, and who could bear removal to Vermont, and present lists of such men to the Surgeon General by whom an order would be given

for their removal. The Commissioners were not to interfere in any manner with men in the camps, or in the field, but were only to act with reference to men who had been transferred to Hospitals.[5]

Holbrook's 1863 report noted that the commissioners had travelled over 10,000 miles in the effort, visiting over 2,500 wounded and ill Vermonters in more than 100 U.S. General and Field Hospitals. Of those visited, more than 1,000 were then transferred to Vermont hospitals.[6] His 1965 report listed 10,000 to 12,000 visited and at least 6,000 transferred to Vermont.[7]

This transfer of wounded to their native states helped resolve a frequent complaint voiced by regimental and company commanders. They reported that men sent to a general hospital frequently failed to rejoin their units either because they were kept on in hospital related work or because they suffered extended recovery periods due to overcrowded hospital conditions far from home. With these complaints in mind, agents in charge of the transfer program were cautioned that they must keep careful records of the men removed to Vermont. Peter T. Washburn, Adjutant and Inspector General of Vermont, wrote to Colonel Frank E. Howe, Military Agent for Vermont, that he must:

> ...instruct each man forwarded to Vermont, to report to the Adjutant General Vermont, each two weeks after his arrival there, stating the place where he is, his condition in point of health, and the prospect of his recovery for service.[8]

Responding to arguments advanced against

sending wounded and ill soldiers to their home state because it was believed that once they recovered they would "...be apt to slip off and go home...",[9] Washburn asserted that the new system forced the Army to keep better records on the wounded and hospitalized.[10]

In fact, Vermont State records show that through 1865, over two-thirds of the patients from all three Union Army hospitals in Vermont were returned to duty:

Hospital	Admitted	Returned to Duty[11]
Brattleboro	1,258	826
Burlington	702	481
Montpelier	926	619
Total	2,886	1,916

This rate was considerably better than that of Army hospitals in Washington and Philadelphia for the same period which was approximately 25 percent.[12] Of the 136 men who did desert from Sloan Hospital, 88 returned voluntarily.[13] (Among the Janes Papers is a request for more guards.) Even though the penalty for desertion was death, at least 48 men decided to take their chances.

Frank Holbrook commented that the trip North was far from injurious to the condition of the patients:"...many men have immediately and wonderfully improved by the change...by the prospect of being near home again, and not a soldier has died on way." In part, this was due to the care with which the commissioners selected the patients eligible for transfer and to the effort that they made to provide healthful transport:

> ...in comfortable hospital cars, fitted up with every convenience, with easy berths for those cases not able to sit

up, and each detachment under charge of a skillful surgeon, and a sufficient detail of nurses, and usually one of the Commissioners has accompanied them to Vermont or as far as New York...[14]

Another important factor affecting the survival rate was the fact that anyone who survived the wretched transport from battlefield to hospital was a good candidate for recovery.

Strong arguments were made in favor of the "...general excellence, healthy location, and good management" of the Vermont Union Army hospitals. It was believed that the Vermont air and elevation provided superior conditions for recuperation. The report of Dr. Edward E. Phelps, Surgeon in charge of the Union Army hospital at Brattleboro, describes afflictions common to the men and the quality of Vermont medical attention:

> ...the sick forwarded to Vermont should embrace three classes of patients, who have suffered most severely at the South, and amongst whom the greatest mortality prevailed, viz:--Those of the chronic diarrhea; those of protracted recovery from the malarial typhoid affection so common in the Army of the Potomac; and lastly, those cases of gun-shot wounds in which a bad condition of the system existed.
>
> Of the cases of chronic diarrhea there have been only two or three that have been over three months in the hospital, but what have recovered, and of those who have spent a less period, marked improvement has taken place. With this disease, our expectations have been more than realized, and we have to re-

gret that men could not, at an earlier period of the war, have been brought into hospitals within the State. The typhoid cases treated were not so numerous as those of chronic diarrhea, but the success has been nearly equal. Some cases of fever that came in from the nine months' regiments, when they returned to be mustered out, were more fatal. I am still more fully persuaded that in protracted convalescence from the typhoid disease, secondary affections may, for the most part, be avoided by the return of the patient to their native climate. The gun-shot wounds have been numerous, forming at least one-third of the whole number received into hospital. Thus far, every case has either recovered, or bids fair to do so at an early period.

Thus it may safely be said that the enterprise of bringing men from the Southern hospitals to the State has been a successful one...[15]

Credit for the establishment of Sloan Hospital in Montpelier and the other Union Army hospitals in Vermont probably rests with Vermont Governor J. Gregory Smith. His strong political base as well as his position as a railroad magnate made him extremely influential at the time. Baxter U.S. General Hospital, the first military hospital in the state, which opened in April 1862, was the former Marine Hospital in Burlington. An overflow of sick and wounded were housed in:

...temporary quarters...at the old town alms house and in tents....Several buildings were erected in a substantial manner, shingled and clapboarded outside, and lathed and plastered inside.

> ...If the buildings should be no longer required for hospital purposes, they could easily be separated into sections of 24 feet by 12, and removed and sold for dwellings....Subsequently, the expense of erecting the buildings was paid by the General Government, and other buildings added so as to furnish ample accommodations for more than five hundred patients.[16]

Baxter Hospital was named after Portus Baxter, a member of Congress from Vermont. The second was Smith U.S.A. General Hospital, a former state hospital in Brattleboro, renamed in honor of Governor Smith and transferred to the U.S. Government on December 22, 1862.

In the fall of 1863, a site in Montpelier was selected for a third hospital, and a building to accommodate approximately 500 patients was built during following the winter and spring. It was named after U.S. Army Surgeon William J. Sloan, Medical Director of the Department of the East. Opening in June 1864, it was commanded in succession by Dr. William B. Casey, Dr. George B. Jaquette, and Dr. Henry Janes.[17]

Several months of research and an advertisement in the local newspaper have failed to produce any picture or photograph of Sloan Hospital. It seems safe to assume from written descriptions, however, that it was not unlike the hospitals still in use at posts, camps and stations during the early 1940's. Although the plumbing had been improved by then, the basic Army design remained the same. Records list a total of 25 buildings, which included a "dead house" (morgue), an octagonal water tank, a chapel, a laundry, a barn, the

Veterans Reserve Corps barracks,[18] and "...one of the best ice houses in the state."[19] In his history of Montpelier Seminary, Walter Davenport described the main hospital building:

> ...Something of the magnitude of the Sloan Hospital may be indicated by the fact that it held 496 beds...This hospital was built in a series of wards radiating from a common center, like the spokes of a mammoth wheel. These wards were twenty-five in number, twenty-seven feet wide, seventy-two feet long and a story and a half in height. A wide veranda circled the wards at their hub, and the writer has seen crippled soldiers racing each other on crutches around this veranda.[20]

Raymond Flynn observed that Sloan Hospital was probably built in "...the approved ridge ventilated, pavilion style" of the typical U.S. Military hospital."[21]

The State of Vermont assumed the $13,900 cost of constructing Sloan Hospital, but records indicate that the State was later compensated by the U.S. Government which "...assigned to Vermont over half a million dollars worth of arms, munitions, and equipment." To store this materiel a State Arsenal was built on Seminary Hill. The 22 acres occupied by Sloan Hospital buildings were later sold by Vermont Quartermaster General Perley P. Pitkin and the money deeded to the State.[22] Should there be any doubts about the honesty of Vermont's "public servants" in those days, examine the detailed records of the expenditures for construction of Sloan Hospital. In the Quartermaster General's report of 1863, every last nail was accounted for and such

entries as $2.00 to Marble Russell for services as painter, $11.25 to J. Cahoo for services of team, or the charge from J. V. Babcock & Co. for six windows and one door are typical.[23]

The history of the selection of Montpelier as the site for Sloan Hospital is not clear, but the logic of the choice is stated by Samuel V. Thayer, Jr., Surgeon General of Vermont, in a letter to the Governor dated 1863:

> ...I have visited several towns in Northern, Middle and Eastern sections of the State and examined such localities--I recommend...the erection of temporary wooden buildings for wards, officers' quarters, culinary purposes, dispensary and all others necessary for hospital accommodations for three or four hundred patients on what is known as the Fair Ground in Montpelier for the following reasons, viz:--
>
> First: It has an altitude considered favorable for the successful treatment of a large class of diseases contracted in the Army from exposure to the pestilential miasms emanating from swamps and low grounds, consisting of about twenty acres of the upper terrace of table land, eighty-five feet above the bed of the Onion 'Winooski' River and six hundred fifty feet above tidewater surrounded nearly on every side by up-towering green hills.
>
> Second: It can, with trifling expense, be furnished with an abundance of fresh running water--
>
> Third: It is a central locality, easy of access for the transportation of patients, and affording better facili-

ties to a large number of friends and relatives of sick and wounded soldiers in hospitals--[24]

Patients arrived on the Central Vermont Railroad. There must have been a road to Seminary Hill, because the hilltop had been the sight of the fairground and reportedly, a race track for Morgan racers, but East State Street was not yet constructed. The "arch" at the foot of what is now East State Street was flanked by a livery stable, but there were no buildings up the hill. Davenport, in his **History of Montpelier Seminary**, says that there was only brush and wilderness.[25] The construction of the State's brick armory and the Sloan Hospital increased travel to the hilltop and roads were built. It is unclear what path the wounded and ill took from the railroad up the hill to the hospital.

Commissioner Frank Holbrook estimated that altogether the three Vermont Union Army hospitals had over 2,000 beds. Massachusetts provided only 970 beds and even New York State had only 1,700.[26]

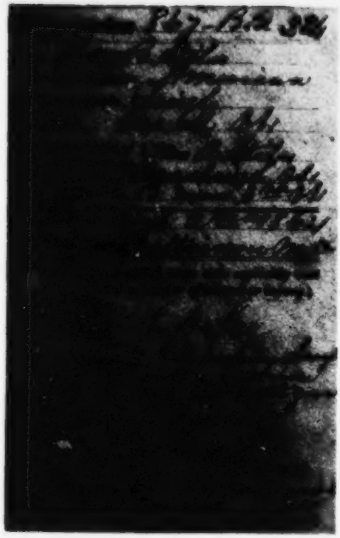
Sloan Hospital, the second largest Union Army hospital in Vermont, was in operation from June 18, 1864, to October 18, 1865. Patients treated were largely from northern New England. In the first detachment of 291 sent to the hospital, 117 were from Maine and Massachusetts with the remainder from Vermont. Individual patient records, carefully kept on file cards, are preserved in Dr. Jane's Papers. According to the Vermont Surgeon General's final report, the number of soldiers treated at Sloan Hospital totaled 1,670.[27]

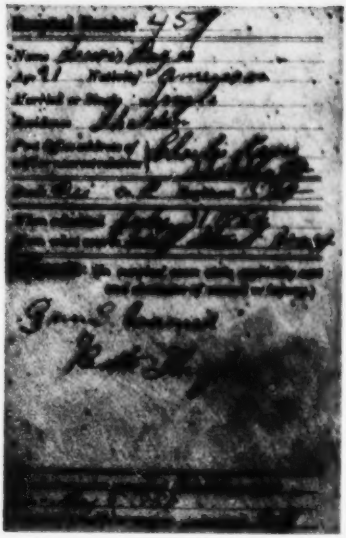
Most of the patients were suffering from diarrhea, gunshot wounds, or malaria. An un-

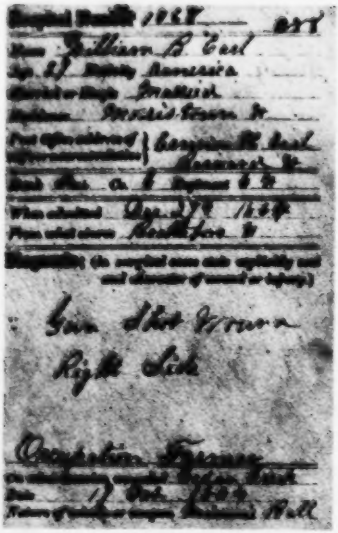
marked grave on the old Armory grounds contains the remains of a soldier who reportedly died of smallpox and was buried as quickly as possible. The Sloan Hospital plot at Green Mountain cemetery in Montpelier, contains the graves of five soldiers from Maine units, two from Vermont units, and one whose unit was unknown. These patients at Sloan were exceptions, however; the majority of patients recovered.

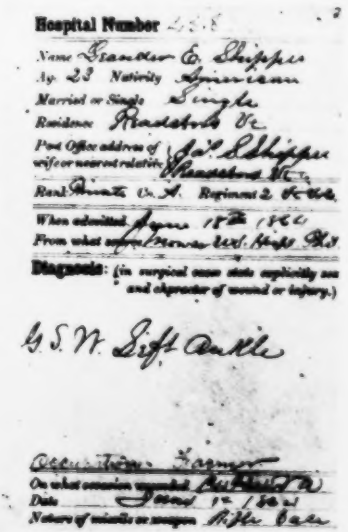
Sloan Hospital had no plumbing, running water, electricity, central heating, insulation, or other amenities that are now considered essential. Conditions must have been hectic at times. Many of the men classified as wounded were actually missing an arm or leg. A wound in the arm or leg generally required amputation and cauterization of the stump with a hot iron. During this period most severe wounds were fatal because of infection. Despite these conditions, however, most of the patients at Sloan Hospital recovered and many even rejoined their units.

Except for the fact that he died while a patient at Sloan Hospital, young Benjamin F. Shepard, Jr., a resident of Marshfield, Vermont, (and possibly a relative of this writer) was a typical patient. Benjamin enlisted from Worcester with Company I of the Eleventh Vermont Regiment in September, 1862, at the age of 19. His unit first served as heavy artillery in the defense of Washington. Due to heavy losses in the early days of the Wilderness Campaign, his regiment was reconverted to infantry. At the request of General Sedgewick, the commanding officer of the Sixth Corps, it became part of the First Vermont Brigade. This unit saw desperate fighting at Spottsylvania, Cold Harbor, Petersburg, and many lesser known engagements. Shepard was








Hospital Number
Name Stanton E. Shippee
Diagnosis: (in surgical cases state explicitly seat and character of wound or injury.)
G.S.W. Left Ankle

Courtesy Waterbury Historical Society

Examples of patient record cards used at Sloan General Hospital which were found in the papers of Dr. Henry Janes.

invalided back to Vermont and became a patient at Sloan Hospital on August 25, 1864. He died only a month later, on September 22, of chronic diarrhea. His body was claimed by his father, and he was buried in Marshfield, just 21 years old.[28]

Although most of the patients apparently thrived on the care provided at Sloan Hospital, the Surgeon General reported that a few men were transferred to other Union Army hospitals but gives no explanation.[29] Details are not available, but it appears that a number of men who had met the wrong class of "southern belle" had problems that were not treated at Sloan. They were sent to a special facility away from Montpelier.

Hospital personnel, both the patients and the staff who dined at Sloan, were probably well fed for the day, but their diet was somewhat different from that of today. Supplies available from the Subsistence Stores at Boston did not include fresh fruits or vegetables, but only such items as fresh beef, salt beef, salt pork, bacon, flour, hard bread, beans, coffee, tea, sugar, vinegar, candles, soap, salt, and pepper.[30] Milk and other perishables were probably purchased locally. A great variety of medicines, ranging from Acacial Pulvis through the alphabet to Zinc Sulphos, could be obtained from the Depot Commissary at Boston. Medical books such as Gray's **Anatomy** or Woodward's **Hospital Steward's Manual**, bedding, clothing, furniture, and other furnishings could also be requisitioned. The only blankets were white, pillows were hair, mattresses were "shuck," and pillowcases were white linen. Even whiskey was available from the Boston Depot because it was used routinely for medical purposes.[31]

Although bills for small purchases of stationery, hardware, medicines, and groceries found in the Janes Papers indicate that Sloan Hospital did some business locally, it is probable that townspeople maintained their distance from the recuperating soldiers.[32] These patients, guards, and other hospital personnel were, after all, young men away from home and typical soldiers returning from combat. It is likely that their thinking was similar to that of all soldiers from the time of Caesar's legions to the veterans of Vietnam. Soldiers and civilians simply do not think alike on many subjects. Contact between the soldiers and the townspeople was probably minimal, with hospital authorities discouraging visits to town.

Little appears in the **Montpelier Argus and Patriot** for the years 1863 through 1866 that might shed light on the attitude of the townspeople toward Sloan Hospital. The editor at that time, Hiram Atkins, a rabid anti-Lincoln man, was opposed to the war and possibly to a Union Army Hospital in his town as well. A few older Montpelier residents recall such things as "...my mother's grandmother used to tell of seeing the wagons of soldiers on their way to the hill." or that "...so and so remembered that as a girl she and others in her class went to sing for the soldiers." Some tell of soldiers who would walk the path down the hill to visit certain disreputable establishments operating just under the "arch" on State Street. Even though East State Street was not yet opened, the path was no doubt well trodden.

Men who were patients in Sloan Hospital printed a small tri-monthly newspaper which sold for five cents a copy or one dollar a year called **The Voice of the Soldier.** Only

one copy survives today in the Vermont Historical Society Library.[33] The "Voice" contained cheerful articles, art work of "...American flags, soldiers, an altar, the Bible, the words, 'Loyalty, Amity and Strength,' and a motto--'No compromise with Traitors'--upon its crest."[34] Featuring lists of the wounded and those discharged, as well as general news from the medical wards, it also carried advertisements such as the one for E. E. Austin, a local photographer who operated on the hospital grounds, and for other businesses in Montpelier.[35]

Much has been written by or about women nurses in the Civil War such as Clara Barton, Mary Livermore, or Louisa May Alcott. The records available for Sloan Hospital do not indicate that any female nurses were on duty there. An advertisement in the **Montpelier Argus and Patriot** specified only male nurses.

Waterbury, Vermont, sent two outstanding men to the Union Army. One was the great cavalry leader, General William Wells. The other was Colonel Henry Janes, better known as Dr. Henry Janes, U.S. Army Surgeon. As a physician and skilled hospital administrator, Dr. Janes was responsible for saving the lives of many Union soldiers. According to G. G. Benedict, "...between 49,000 and 50,000 sick and wounded men passed under his care--a record hardly equalled in the army."[36] Janes' biographical sketch may be found in Lewis's **History of Waterbury, Vermont:**

> ...In 1861 Doctor Janes entered the army, surgeon of the third Vermont volunteers; he was commissioned surgeon of the United States Army in 1863....the greater part of his military service was in hospital duty successively at Bur-

kettsville, in the fall of 1862, where he was placed in charge; at Frederic, Maryland, in the winter; and in charge of the hospitals of the Sixth Army Corps the following spring. In the summer and fall of 1863, he was in charge of the army hospitals in and about Gettysburg and the Letterman General Hospital, where 20,000 wounded soldiers from the field of Gettysburg were being cared for. Here he was afforded an opportunity of studying treatment of fracture and amputations. He spent the winter and spring of 1864 in the South Street General Hospital in Philadelphia. In the summer of 1864, he was in charge of the hospital steamer **Maine**. Going to the Sloan General Hospital at Montpelier in the autumn of 1864, he remained there until the close of the war....He returned to Waterbury in 1867, and resumed his practice...[37]

Examples of the meticulous records kept by Dr. Janes while he commanded at Sloan Hospital can be found in his collected papers. A more complete record of his military service can be found in his "Personal War Sketch" from the record book of Dillingham Post No. 22 of the Grand Army of the Republic, also preserved by the Waterbury Historical Society.

When Sloan Hospital closed in October 1865, the few patients (referred to as "inmates" in the official records) who needed further hospitalization were no doubt transferred to other Union Army hospitals in New England.[38] It was late 1866 before the hospital buildings and their contents were disposed of. A very complete inventory was made and everything was advertised for sale. No record could be found concerning the disposi-

tion of the medical supplies, but it is safe to assume that what remained was stored in the old Arsenal building (called the "Armory" in those days). Anything not sold in the State's "deals" with "banana republics" was lost in a fire during the 1940's.[39]

The buildings and land were purchased by the Newbury Seminary, a Methodist school which moved to Montpelier. Although the State of Vermont had invested approximately $50,000 in the property, the Seminary was able to purchase all of it except the Arsenal for $15,500. This price included the water rights and piping to a large spring said to be "...sufficient for forty families." Deeds for this land contained a clause prohibiting sale of intoxicating liquors on the premises.[40]

The prime mover for Newbury (later Montpelier) Seminary in this "wheeling and dealing" was the Rev. Amasa G. Button, an exceptional man who had headed the Seminary's Board of Trustees for 12 years prior to the move to Montpelier.[41] He resisted enticements from both Northfield and Waterbury to relocate in those towns because he recognized the superior possibilities of the Sloan Hospital site.[42]

Button is said to have planned and supervised the moving of the hospital buildings on rollers across to what is now the eastern side of College Street, and their conversion into dormitories and dining hall. When a building was in place, it was jacked up eleven feet and another story was slid underneath. The main boarding hall of the Seminary was thus constructed into a three story building with a slanted roof and two wings stretching back approximately 100 feet.[43] Due to Button's efforts the Montpelier Seminary was able to open for classes in September 1868.[44]

The Rev. Button is also credited with designing and supervising the construction of College Hall, which was completed in 1872. The large brick Empire style building was built on the site of the hospital's water tank which had been knocked down and buried.[45]

Many of the older homes on Seminary Hill were fashioned from lumber or whole buildings salvaged from Sloan Hospital, purchased from the Seminary (the Rev. Button as agent) and moved into place on rollers. Some buildings were moved a goodly distance down Seminary Avenue (now College Street), while others were rolled just a short distance down East State or to Ridge and Kent Streets.[46]

Although this brief paper on the history of the Sloan U.S. Army General Hospital only "hits the high spots," it represents a substantial amount of "digging" and the reading of old and dry reports. Photocopies of pertinent material used in the production of this work will be kept on file in the Archives of Vermont College and in the Special Collections of the Norwich University Library, as a part of the Friends of the Norwich University Library Military History Project. This material is available to any interested person.

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